S&T theJohnsonian

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WUCycle

Saving money while being sustainable

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Special to The Johnsonian

The average person has a detrimental tendency to waste materials. For Winthrop students, this is especially true with the end of the year fast approaching. As we prepare for move out day, items are either being packed or tossed in the dumpster. Fortunately, there are ways to combat this on campus, such as WUCycle—an event that occurs every year in April.

"Myself and some other staff members created this event several years ago. We just decided that it would be a good idea to get items together that people didn't need," Assistant Director of Residence Life Julianne Schrader said.

Students brought their gently used items to the SAC to donate from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. on April 8. From 12 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. that same day, students came in to look around to pick up items for free. Event coordinators gave everything left over to charity.

"So it's basically like trying to de-clutter but also picking up what you really need at the same time," Schrader said.

The items donated vary from kitchen appliances, home decor and holiday decorations, to books, toys, bags and clothing items. It is rare for a student to walk out without having found at least one thing that they need or could use.

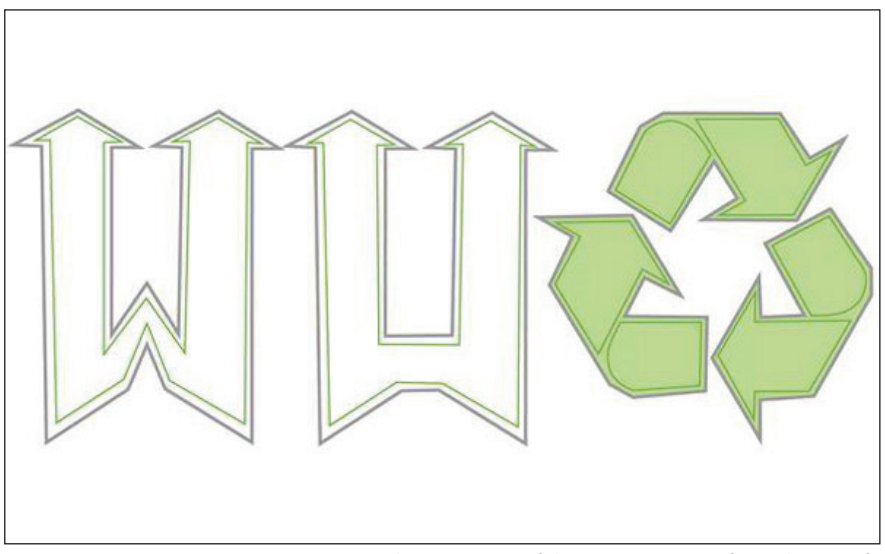
Not only is there a benefit in saving money on items you would otherwise have to purchase, but by participating in this event students contribute to the sustainability effort. This contribution is two-fold.

On the one hand, students are donating items they would otherwise throw away. Christopher Johnson, Winthrop's Sustainability Coordinator, said that Winthrop diverted over 8,000 pounds of material from the landfill last year, and this event was a major contributor.

On the other hand, reusing items you need instead of purchasing new ones conserves the energy that would otherwise be utilized to produce or procure those commodities.

"There's embodied energy in all those resources," Christopher Johnson said. "It takes energy to make that stuff and when you throw it in the trash you've just wasted all that energy."

According to Winthrop's Office of Sustainability website, about 125 recycled aluminum cans save the amount of energy to supply power to one home per day. Also, a glass bottle requires roughly 1 million years to decompose in a landfill. What we trash may seem like small decisions, but those decisions multiply and have a considerable impact on the environment.



Graphic courtesy of the Department of Residence Life

This year, Schrader said that about 50 percent of the total items donated were given to the Rock Hill Dream Center.

"The Rock Hill Dream Center says that every bit of what they pick up gets utilized in some way," she said. "Some of the items even go to other parts of the world."

Unfortunately, this event has seen a slight decrease in participants and donations over the past three years. This year there were 89 participants, which is slightly less than the usual 100 participants.

"Not as high attendance as I want to get," Schrader said. "But not a bad program considering the only cost to Winthrop is what it costs to make 100 fliers to put around campus."

Practicing a sustainable lifestyle can extend beyond this yearly event. The goal of the Office of Sustainability is to expand Winthrop's recycling program and reduce unnecessary waste.

There are many centralized stations throughout campus and located in each building to make it convenient to recycle a variety of materials. Christopher Johnson is also open to answering any questions students may have about recycling on campus. You can contact him at johnsonc@winthrop.edu.

TECH TIP OF THE WEEK

Advanced Search in Google is very helpful, but there are ways to focus your search without it. Putting quotes around your search will search for exact words. For example, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself" would only return websites containing FDR's famous quote. Using site followed by a colon (:) allows you to search within a certain website. If you are looking for the search directory at Winthrop, you could type "search directory site: Winthrop.edu" (without the quotes). Removing Winthrop will search across all .edu sites, so this is good if you are looking for government (.gov) or scholarly (.edu) sources.

Diverting quality food from landfills

Student working to start food recovery program

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The Office of Sustainability weighed the amount of food wasted in the Thompson building March 3 and found that 285 pounds of food was wasted, but one Winthrop student is working to do something about it.

Junior English major Mallory Crimi is in the process of starting a chapter of the Food Recovery Network on campus.

This is a national initiative that works to take perfectly good food, that would otherwise go to a landfill and returns that food to the community, feeding those who do not have access to quality food.

While it is important for students to be aware of how much waste they are producing when they don't eat everything they put on their plates, this amount pales in comparison to the amount of food wasted by restaurants and school cafeterias.

"When you go into Thompson at 10 minutes away from the dining hall being closed, there are just trays full of food that are just sitting there and no one's eating," Crimi said.

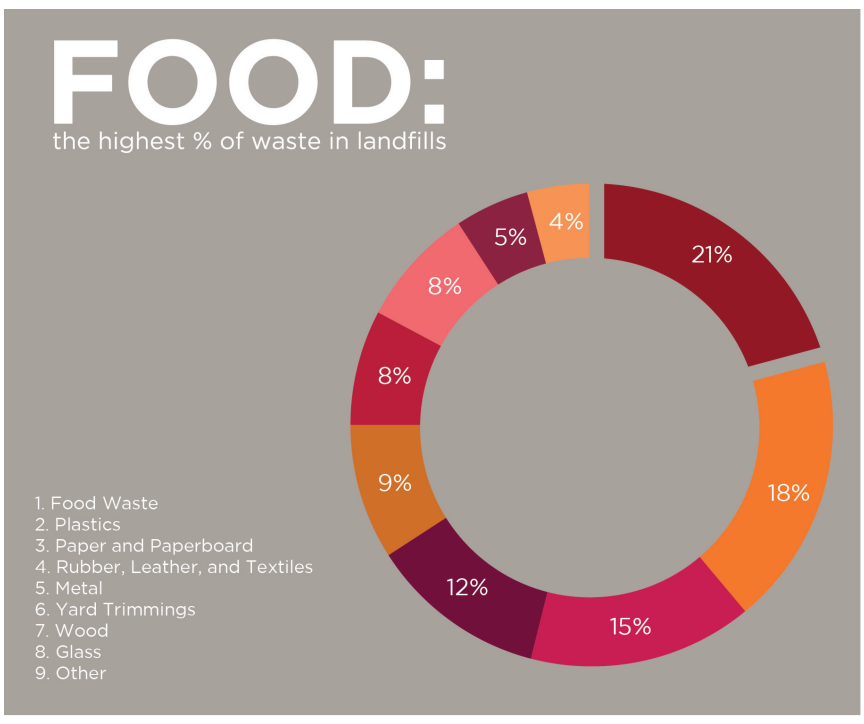
According to the Environmental Protection Agency, 95 percent of food ends up in landfills resulting in 35 million tons of food waste in 2013.

This is a major issue due to the fact that the USDA reports that more than 49 million people lived in food-insecure households that same year.

Currently, all of the food that is not eaten by students is thrown away. If Aramark and Dining Services accept Crimi's proposal, they could instead put this food in containers, which student volunteers would then take to a charitable organization.

This organization could then provide food to those living in food insecure environments in York County.

"You don't see a large homeless population like you would in a bigger city like Charlotte, but we do have a good number of people who could use the resources," Crimi said.



Reagan Martin / The Johnsonian

Crimi said that she is in the process of finding a local nonprofit that would be willing to help with the initiative and said that one of the organizations she is considering is the Dorothy Day Soup Kitchen.

This organization holds strong possibilities as it already provides hot meals to the hungry. It also holds connections to Winthrop through SOAR, a student-directed club that works to benefit the surrounding community.

The next step is going to be talking to Dining Services about starting the program and incorporating this program could help them as well.

According to the EPA, between 4 and 10 percent of food is thrown out before ever reaching a customer's plate. This translates to an average of $7 thousand wasted for every $100 thousand.

The EPA reports that reducing food waste lowers purchasing costs, lowers disposal costs and provides an avenue for receiving tax incentives.

Anyone interested in the food recovery program can contact Crimi at crimim3@winthrop.edu.

"If you want to try and get involved, we do have a leadership committee," she said. "That would be something great to put on your resume."